

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

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INDIA RADIO AND TV

ANNCR:

IN INDIA, THE COMMISSION SET UP TO STUDY THE FUTURE OF INDIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION HAS RECOMMENDED ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AUTONOMOUS NATIONAL TRUST TO ADMINISTER THE COUNTRY'S BROADCAST MEDIA. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS A BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

THE RECOMMENDATIONS ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK ARE AIMED AT FULFILLING A PLEDGE BY THE NEW JANATA GOVERNMENT WHEN IT CAME TO POWER IN ELECTIONS LAST MARCH. THAT PROMISE WAS TO SEE THAT INDIA'S MASS COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA, WHICH FELL INTO DISREPUTE DURING MISSUS GANDHI'S STATE OF EMERGENCY, WOULD BE ALLOWED TO FUNCTION FREELY AND THAT IT COULD N E V E R AGAIN BE USED AS A PROPAGANDA ARM OF THE PARTY IN POWER. IN LINE WITH THIS PROMISE, THE GOVERNMENT IS ALREADY BRFAKING UP THE NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY, SAMACHAR, A CREATURE OF THE GANDHI GOVERNMENT, INTO ITS ORIGINAL INDEPENDENT COMPONENTS, PRESS TRUST OF INDIA AND UNITED NEWS OF INDIA. THE TWO PRIVATE NEWS AGENCIES ARE EXPECTED TO BEGIN FUNCTIONING WITHIN A FEW MONTHS.

IN ITS FOUR-HUNDRED PAGE REPORT, THE PRODUCT OF SEVEN MONTHS OF STUDY, THE COMMISSION ON BROADCASTING PROPOSED THAT ALL INDIA RADIO AND BOORDARSHAN, THE NATIONAL TELEVISION NETWORK, SHOULD BE GOVERNORED BY AN INDEPENDENT IMPARTIAL AND AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZATION, ESTABLISHED BY PARLIAMENT TO ACT AS A TRUSTEE FOR THE NATIONAL INTEREST. TO REINFORCE ITS PRINCIPLE EVEN MORE, THE COMMISSION SAID THE AUTONOMY AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE TWO NETWORKS WOULD BE WRITTEN INTO THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION. THE STUDY COMMISSION SAID THAT IN THEIR PRESENTATION OF NEWS AND

COMMENT, THE BROADCASTING SERVICES SHOULD NOT HAVE EDITORIAL OPINIONS OF THEIR OWN, BUT THAT CONTRASTING VIEWPOINTS AND ANALYSIS SHOULD BE PRESENTED.

AMONG THE OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS: THAT THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES BE APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRIME MINISTER, AND THAT A SEPARATE BOARD BE APPOINTED FOR THE COUNTRY'S CHIEF JUSTICE TO LOOK INTO ANY COMPLAINTS OF UNFAIR AND UNJUST TREATMENT, INCLUDING INVASION OF PRIVACY. ANOTHER RECOMMENDATION IS THAT MUCH GREATER ATTENTION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND THAT THE NEW BOARD OF TRUSTEES SHOULD BE GIVEN THE POWER TO GRANT RADIO AND TELEVISION FRANCHISES TO APPROVED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. THE COMMISSION SAID A SPECIAL EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO RAISE THE QUALITY OF NEWS COVERAGE, PARTICULARLY, NEWS RELATING TO DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS. IN THIS REGARD THE GROUP SAID IT BELIEVES THAT FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS, FIRST PRIORITY SHOULD GO TO RADIO, SINCE THIS IS THE MEDIUM MOST ACCESSIBLE TO INDIA'S MASSES OF RURAL POOR.

REACTION TO THE PROPOSALS THUS FAR HAS BEEN MOSTLY FAVORABLE. SEVERAL NEWSPAPERS CRITICIZED THE METHODS OF CHOOSING A BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND POINTED OUT THAT THE TWO BROADCAST SERVICES WILL BE FINANCIALLY DEPENDENT ON THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT FOR A LONG TIME TO COME. BUT MOST ECHOED THE SENTIMENTS OF THE TIMES OF INDIA WHICH DESCRIBED THE COMMISSION REPORT AS A FINE MESH OF IDEALISM AND PRAGMATISM. THE COMMISSION, SAID THE TIMES EDITORIAL, HAS UNEQUIVOCALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE RIGHT TO INFORM AND TO BE INFORMED IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT WHICH DESERVES TO TAKE ITS PLACE ALONGSIDE THE OTHER FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION.

GH/RCS